

Investigators probe Russian jet crash in Egypt amid IS claims

01/11/2015 17:10 by admin

Cairo: International investigators today began probing the crash of a Russian Airbus plane in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula that killed all the 224 people on board as black boxes were recovered and sent for analysis amid claims by an Islamic State-affiliate group that it downed the jet.

The Islamic State-affiliate group in Egypt, which is waging a deadly insurgency in the Sinai, claimed it downed the plane in the mountainous area of the Sinai Peninsula but Cairo and Moscow both rejected the claim.

Egyptian Prime Minister Sharif Ismail said experts had confirmed that the militants could not down a plane at the 30,000 feet while Russian Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said the claim "cannot be considered accurate". Mohamed Samir, Egypt's army spokesman, also disputed the claim, saying,

"They can put out whatever statements they want but there is no proof at this point that terrorists were responsible for this plane crash. We will know the true reasons when the Civil Aviation Authority in coordination with Russian authorities completes its investigation. But the army sees no authenticity to the claims."

Russian and French investigators have joined the Egyptian-led probe into one of the deadliest Airbus incidents of the past decade, along with experts from the aviation giant, which is headquartered in France. The plane's black boxes have been found and sent for analysis, officials said.

Investigators said they were checking fuel samples from the last refuelling stop, in the Russian city of Samara, and have focused on the possibility that a technical failure could have caused the 18-year-old plane to crash, killing 217 passengers, including 17 children, and seven crew members.

A spokesman said investigators were questioning people who were involved in preparing the aircraft and its crew and were carrying out searches at Moscow's Domodedovo airport where the airline that operated the plane was based. A criminal case had been opened against Kogalymavia for "violation of rules of flight and preparation for them".

Kogalymavia, which is also known as Metrojet, was quoted by Russian news agency Ria Novosti as saying that there were "no grounds" to blame the tragedy on human error. Captain Valery Nemov, 48, had 3,682 hours of flight time. In Russia, the wife of the plane's co-pilot said her husband had complained about the plane's condition.

Natalya Trukhacheva told state-controlled NTV that their daughter had called Sergei Trukachev before the flight left Sharm el-Sheikh. "He complained before the flight that the technical condition of the aircraft left much to be desired," she said. Egypt's Prime Minister has said a technical fault was the likely cause, dismissing claims by Islamic State militants.

However, three airlines—"Emirates, Air France and Lufthansa"—have decided not to fly over the Sinai Peninsula until more information is available.

- PTI